Le Walloon

Clearly, Walloon is the langue d'oïl—apart from French—showing the greatest vitality today. The specific term "Walloon" has been in use since at least the early 16th century. Previously, as in other Latin-speaking regions, the generic term "Roman" was used.

The specific term "Walloon" has been used since at least the beginning of the 16th century. Previously, we used, as in from other Latin regions, the generic one of "novel". It is the indigenous language of Wallonia (the south of Belgium), but it is, or was, also present in France, in the north of the Ardennes department and in some communes of the North. It was also spoken until recently in two or three villages of the Grand Duchy from Luxembourg. In the 19th century, Walloon was exported in the United States, particularly in the Green Bay region in Wisconsin where some old people still use it between them. It is also necessary to point out the presence of numerous Walloons residing in Brussels.

The Walloon domain, which represents a linguistic area reduced (a square of about 150 km on each side), does not cover besides not the whole of Wallonia since other languages endogenous ones are also present there: Picard (in the western half of the province of Hainaut), Lorraine (south of the Belgian province of Luxembourg) and the Champagne region (to the south of that of Namur) which fall under the Roman domain; the Frankish Rhenish-Mosan (northeast of the province of Liège) and the Moselle Franconian (in the outskirts of Arlon) which are from the Germanic domain.

The study of Walloon raises certain problems, in particular due to the superposition of several linguistic levels: the Common French, regional French influenced by the native language, and Walloon itself. It must also be taken into account that some speakers imagine they are speaking Walloon when, in fact, it is another langue d'oïl; this is particularly the case in the Picardy-speaking part of Wallonia. For starters, Walloon is a very varied language with significant differences depending on the region. Generally, a division into four groups is proposed.

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• central Walloon, with the capital of Wallonia, Namur, and the towns of Wavre and Dinant;
• eastern Walloon (or east Walloon), with Liège, Malmedy, Verviers, Huy and Waremme;
• western Walloon (or west-Walloon), with Charleroi, Nivelles, La Louvière and Philippeville;
• southern Walloon, with the towns of Bastogne, Marche and Neufchâteau.

Walloon is characterized by phonetic conservatism marked and, like Picard, by a significant Germanic influence. It was formed between the 6th and 13th centuries from the Vulgar Latin used in the region by settlers, Romans, merchants and soldiers. Many of its features considered as characteristics appeared during this historical period. In the Middle Ages, the composite language written in Walloon country, called scripta, is a mixed French of indigenous elements-Picards and Walloons- but which tends to get ever closer to standard French.

At the beginning of the 17th century, the French graphic system, which does not reproduce the features of the oral vernacular of the time, was imposed in Wallonia. This results in an awareness of the distance existing between the French written language and the spoken language, which will allow the emergence of a literature of Walloon expression. It was during the second It was in the mid-19th century that a Walloon identity began to emerge and develop alongside the emergence of a Flemish identity; this caused many relationship problems that the complex federalization of the country will make it less acute without making them disappear. The proportion of speakers remained relatively stable until the beginning of the 19th century, but fell sharply between the 1930s and 1960s regularly active speakers would now represent between 35 to 45% of the population of the linguistic area. The situation therefore remains diglossic. Walloon is not used, in general, that in informal situations it is almost ruled out by school and media. The number of speakers remains, however, relatively large and corresponds to at least a hundred of thousands of individuals.

There is no standard language. However, a system developed by Jules Feller in 1908 allows the transcription of the relatively easy way Walloon in its various forms modalities. About ten years ago, efforts were made to develop a standardized written language and to create neologisms despite violent diatribes.

The first standardized Walloon course was offered in September 2001 in Louvain-la-Neuve. The same year, a Walloon summary of standardized grammar was published on the Internet network thanks to the efforts of Lorint-Hendschel.

Since the 17th century, French has remained the language in Wallonia. only language for official texts. This reality has not, however, did not prevent the uninterrupted development of a literature of Walloon expression. There is thus a poetry of quality and the theater has seen abundant production from the second half of the 19th century (more than 10,000 pieces listed!). Prose developed especially from the century last and literary productions have recently diversified considerably (comics, songs, translations, non-narrative prose...).

Here are some general introductory works to literature Walloon:
• Piron, Maurice, Anthology of Walloon literature, Liège, Mardaga, 1978 (recent reissue).
• Limes II. Selection of texts in regional Romance languages from Wallonia, Brussels, Traditions and popular dialects Wallonia-Brussels, 1992.
• Scrîre. Panorama of literature in regional languages of Wallonia from 1970 to 1990 (Poetry and prose), Liège, Union Walloon Culture, 1993.

There are general presentation works such as:
• Limes 1. Regional Romance languages in Wallonia, Brussels, Traditions and popular dialects Wallonia-Brussels, 1992.

• Francard, Michel, Langues d'oïl in Wallonia, Charleroi, micRomania, 2000.
• The rooster crows... it will wake you up Vade-mecum Languages regional in the Wallonia-Brussels Community, Brussels, Department of Endogenous Regional Languages, 2002.

Many dictionaries have been published; among them are those that are still available:
• Central Walloon:
Leonard, Lucien, Namur Lexicon, Liège, Society of Walloon Language and Literature, 1989.
• Eastern Walloon:
Haust, Jean, Liège Dictionary, Liège, VaillantCarmanne, 1933 (reissued).
• Western Walloon:
Car lier, Arille, Dictionary of West Walloon, (edited by
Willy BAL), Walloon Literary Association of Charleroi, vol. 1, 1985; t. 2, 1988; t. 3, 1991.
• Southern Walloon:
Francard, Michel, Dictionary of Walloon dialects of Bastogne country, DeBoeck University & Museum of the Word in the Bastogne region, 1994.
• Eastern French-Walloon:
Haust, Jean, French-Liège Dictionary, Liège, Vaillant-Carmanne, 1948 (reissued).

In terms of linguistic geography, we will point out the very important linguistic atlas of Wallonia including Jean Haust as the initiator (7 volumes have already been published). There is no daily or weekly press, however, French-language national magazines or newspapers reserve, regularly or occasionally, a place in Walloon. There are several periodicals:

• Djazans wallon (monthly). Information (eastern Walloon); General De Gaulle Street, 71, B4020 Liège.
• Èl Bourdon (monthly). Literature (West Walloon) and information (in French); rue de Namur, 600, B 6200 Chatelet.
• Les Cahiers wallons (monthly). Literature (especially in central Walloon); rue de l'Agasse, 77, B 5030 Gembloux.
• Singuliers (quarterly). Literature (southern Walloon) and information (French). Lutrebois 103, B 6600 Bastogne.
• Li Ranteule (quarterly). Information (common Walloon); 165, rue de Lonzée, B 5030 Gembloux.
• La Wallonne (quarterly). Literature (Eastern Walloon). Address: Tier des Bruyères, 11, B 4684 Hacourt.
• Li Chwès (monthly). Information (central Walloon), street des Graiges, 4, B 5100 Wépion.
• MicRomania (quarterly). Literature in all languages less widespread Romanesque; the texts are accompanied by translations (in French, Italian or Spanish); rue de Namur, 600, B 6200 Châtelet. Responsible for publishing this quarterly: Jean-Luc Fauconnier.
• Èl Mouchan d'Aunia (monthly). Littérature (West Walloon and Picard) and folklore; rue de la Résistance, 20, B 7100 La Louvière.
• Lu vî Sprâwe (directory). Literature (eastern Walloon); route de Falize, 127, B 4960 Malmedy.
• Walloon cultural agenda (monthly). All events interesting things about Walloon throughout Wallonia (theater, puppets, exhibitions, courses); rue Général de Gaulle, 71, B 4020 Liège.

The presence of Walloon at school can be described as "discreet" and this would be due to the lack of teacher training and the scarcity of educational materials. It should be noted nevertheless, Walloon language courses are on the program of two establishments (Charleroi

and Liège) which responsible for training primary school teachers and that courses in dialectology and history of Walloon literature is organized at the university level (Free University of Brussels, University of the Community French University of Liège, Catholic University of Louvain). To overcome this deficiency, there is no shortage of one-off initiatives: evening classes, various competitions and awareness through games or the song.

The same situation exists in the religious field. Walloon is only used sporadically in religious services. He has about two hours a week on public television as well as three hours per week on the radio. Some private stations offer programs in Walloon. The song enjoyed a prosperous period during the seventies and a resurgence of vigor in the beginning of this century due to the huge public success of William Dunker.

The theater has enjoyed considerable success since more than two hundred amateur troupes and two thousand five hundred actors reach more than 300,000 spectators per year. At the institutional level, in 1990, a decree was passed recognizing the existence of "endogenous regional languages" and the need for their promotion within the French Community of Belgium - a component of the Belgian federal state competent in matters of education and culture for the French speakers from Brussels and Wallonia. A Council of endogenous regional languages (CLRE) and a Service of Endogenous regional languages (SLRE), dependent on the Ministry of the French Community, were created. If significant progress has been made in the field of publishing literary or scientific works relating to these languages, we observe that the situation of Walloon has hardly changed regarding the teaching or display of names of places. (CLRE or SLRE, Space 27 September, Boulevard Leopold II, 44, B-1080 Brussels. Website: www.cfwb.be/langreg).

Paradoxically at first glance, Belgium still has not not signed the European Charter for Regional Languages or minorities and this is because of a different perception of the notion of "regional speaking" in the north and south of the country. The Flemish community tends to assimilate these dialects to dialects-linguistic vectors that are excluded from benefits of this Charter- while the French Community considers them as "endogenous languages". However, as it is the States which must sign and ratify this Charter, it is appropriate that a national agreement be reached, and this is where things are dragging on. Modeled on an academy, and functioning as such, was founded in Liège, in 1856, the Society of Language and Walloon Literature (SLLW) which publishes linguistic works and literary works that concern all regional Romance languages of Wallonia. (SLLW, place du XX August, 7, B 4000 Liège).

The main association for the defense of Walloon is the Union Walloon cultural association (UCW). It brings together in its five federations provincial more than 250 local associations, especially theatre troupes as well as groups that campaign for the presence of Walloon at school. (UCW, rue Général de Gaulle, 71, B 4020 Liège).

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Excerpt translated from “Langues d'Oïl et idiomes apparentés” by Joan-Pere Pujol